

## May 11, 2005- Study Says 3.7 Billion Hours Wasted Sitting in Traffic Per Year

### STUDY SAYS 3.7 BILLION HOURS WASTED SITTING IN TRAFFIC PER YEAR

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) pointed to a study on traffic congestion to note the urgency of gasoline price relief for southern West Virginia and the entire Nation. "West Virginians are spending more and more time in their cars due to traffic congestion causing them to lose time, money and even patience! As we sit in traffic, not only are we wasting precious gasoline, but we're wasting valuable time away from our family," said Rahall.

The traffic study, released by the Texas Transportation Institute, found that in 2003, the most recent year studied, the Nation's drivers experienced 3.7 billion hours of delay and wasted 2.3 billion gallons of fuel stuck in traffic. The cost of this congestion to the Nation, in 2003 dollars, is an all-time high of \$63.1 billion. The report also finds that more of our roads and highways are suffering from congestion, and longer periods of the day are affected by increasingly worse congestion.

According to the U.S. Census, the average West Virginian spends nearly 25 minutes on their commute to work, giving West Virginians the 12th highest commute time when compared to the other 49 states and the District of Columbia, with neighboring states of Ohio and Kentucky each averaging 22.1 minutes. When extrapolated over time, West Virginians spend 8½ days per year sitting in their cars on the way to work.

Rahall noted that since gasoline prices skyrocketed last month to record highs in West Virginia, the prices have remained drastically high. "Exxon is celebrating its largest first quarter profits of all time and receiving new tax breaks on the backs of average Americans while we continue to pay outrageous prices for their gasoline. This is week six of the gas price crisis in West Virginia and something must be done to ease the pressure on the pocketbooks of hard-working West Virginians," said Rahall.

Rahall has repeatedly called for action from the Administration to lower the price of oil and gasoline. President Bush has apparently changed his mind about pressuring OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) to increase oil production in order to lower the cost to the consumer. In 2000, Bush was adamant that pressuring OPEC was the way to lower prices, but since being elected President he has abandoned this idea. Rahall has also called for an investigation into the possibility of price fixing by the Big Oil companies and has recommended opening the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to help lower gas prices immediately.

"My suggestions seem to be falling upon deaf ears in the White House, but I will not stop fighting to lower these prices and help West Virginians," said Rahall. "I hope the recent release of this traffic congestion study reminds the Administration how important it is to enact the six year highway funding reauthorization bill, which I have worked long and hard on."

The bill, Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (TEA LU), H.R. 3, passed the House of Representatives by an overwhelming margin in March and a similar bill is working its way through the Senate right now. Rahall helped secure \$2.3 billion for West Virginia in TEA LU. "Funding our highways would help alleviate traffic congestion problems across

the Nation," said Rahall. "This is one way we can lower the amount of gasoline used and help everyone lower their travel time, all while passing this crucial and long overdue legislation that will create jobs and development opportunities."

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, 47,500 new jobs are created for every \$1 billion spent on transportation nationally. Unfortunately, President Bush has already threatened to veto this bipartisan legislation because he feels it would invest too much money in our Nation's infrastructure.

"A transportation bill must be signed into law before the end of the month," said Rahall. "The current extension of funding, which is grossly low, will expire on May 31 and we have already signed far too many short-term extensions. It is crucial that a long-term bill for highway funding passes Congress and is signed by President Bush, thus creating jobs, fixing roads, building new roads, and hopefully lowering our gasoline consumption."